

INFO- 2084

Primljeno / Received: 2012-02-13

UDK : 025.5:339.92:061(497.13)

Original Scientific Paper /Izvorni znanstveni rad

AWARENESS OF EUROPEAN UNION AND COMPLETION OF CROATIA'S ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

INFORMIRANOST STUDENATA O EUROPSKOJ UNIJI I ZAVRŠETKU HRVATSKIH PRISTUPNIH PREGOVORA

Goran Popović, Tanja Grmuša, Maša Popović*

*Croatian Communication Association, Zagreb, Croatia; Accredited School of Business Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia**

*Hrvatsko komunikološko društvo, Zagreb, Hrvatska; Visoka poslovna škola Zagreb, Zagreb, Hrvatska**

Abstract

The completion of Croatia's EU accession negotiations was one of the hot topics in the media lately. After the initial euphoria over the achievement of one of the most important foreign policy goals died down, the public started to voice an increasing amount of displeasure and criticize political elites for the non-transparency of the process and the low level of awareness about the contents of the negotiating chapters. Educational deficit stemming from lack of information is just one of the factors that, coupled with prejudice and stereotypes, resulted in growing Euro-scepticism and aversion to the EU and European integration in general. Previous studies undertaken in the same target group showed that youth is one of the hottest groups for communication of EU-related topics because they often overestimate their knowledge about the EU, but are mostly pro-European, as EU accession opens up new opportunities and perspectives for them, mainly in terms of education with employment – not surprisingly, since this is the group that is going to live in the EU one day. The survey was carried out in late October 2011 on a sample of 105 students of communication sciences and attempted to establish how well-informed they were about the European Union, including enlargement policy and functioning of the EU's internal market, with a special emphasis on Croatia's European integration course and the completion of Croatia's accession negotiations. The results revealed that students (youth) were very well-informed about Croatia's European integration course and the completion of the negotiations. Contrary to the expectations, the respondents proved to be well-informed about enlargement policy as well. A lower level of awareness was observed, however, in the department of internal EU market, which opens up the room for improvement for the media and the political elites alike.

Sažetak

Završetak hrvatskih pristupnih pregovora s EU bila je jedna od najekspoziranijih medijskih tema u proteklome razdoblju. Nakon početne euforije zbog ostvarivanja jednog od najvažnijih vanjsko-političkih ciljeva, u javnosti se moglo čuti sve više negodovanja i prozivki upućenih političkim elitama zbog netransparentnosti samoga procesa kao i loše informiranosti građana oko sadržaja pregovaračkih poglavlja. Obrazovni deficit, temeljen na nedostatku informacija, samo je jedan od faktora koji, uz predrasude i stereotipe, rezultira jačanjem euroskepticizma i negativnoga raspoloženja prema EU i eurointegracijama općenito. Ranija istraživanja pokazala su kako su mladi svakako jedna od poželjnijih skupina za informiranje budući da nerijetko precjenjuju svoje znanje o EU, ali su uglavnom proeuropski orijentirani budući da ulazak u EU za njih otvara nove mogućnosti i perspektive ponajprije u smislu obrazovanja i zapošljavanja, što ne čudi budući da je riječ o skupini koja će jednoga dana i živjeti u EU. Istraživanje provedeno krajem listopada 2011. na uzorku od 105 ispitanika, studenata komunikologije, analiziralo je informiranost studenata o Europskoj uniji, uključujući politiku proširenja te funkcioniranja unutarnjeg tržišta EU-a, s posebnim naglaskom na hrvatski eurointegracijski put i završetak hrvatskih pristupnih pregovora. Rezultati su pokazali kako su studenti (mladi) jako dobro informirani o hrvatskom eurointegracijskom putu kao i završetku pregovora. Nadalje, suprotno očekivanjima pokazalo se kako su ispitanici dobro informirani i oko politike proširenja, dok je kod funkcioniranja unutarnjeg tržišta EU-a uočena slabija informiranost što otvara dodatan prostor za poboljšanje kako medijima tako i političkim elitama.

1. Introduction

Croatia wrapped up the long process of EU accession negotiations at the beginning of June 2011 by fulfilling all the required criteria in the last and most controversial Chapter 23 (Judiciary). The initial enthusiasm over this great historical event did not last long and the public is increasingly giving voice to dissatisfaction with lack of information about the negotiating chapters and the principles agreed upon during the six years of the negotiating process. This is confirmed by the results of public opinion surveys, which show that ordinary citizens are poorly informed. Even though the political elites maintain that the entire process had been open and transparent, invoking availability of all information and contents on the websites of government institutions and participants of the negotiations, the results of surveys carried out by non-governmental institutions and organizations, which show that a third of Croatian citizens is not aware that negotiations with the EU have been wrapped up even after three months, are disturbing. Poor knowledge of any issue, including the EU, results in ungrounded fears and misconceptions based on prejudice and stereotypes, and acts as a hothouse of Euro-scepticism. The referendum information campaign is going to follow the signing of the accession negotiations and youth is bound to be its target group. Since youth has the highest internet access and activity rates, one would expect them to be the best informed about the EU. This paper will try to establish if this is really the case.

2. Croatia's European course

Croatia's second foreign policy priority will be attained with EU accession. The first priority, to join the NATO, had been attained in 2009. The European integration process formally began when the Stabilisation and Association Agreement was signed on October 29, 2001 and Croatia was granted potential candidate status. This was the first time that an aspiring member was awarded this political title. The idea was to reward and encourage further efforts on Croatia's part to fulfil the conditions for European integration and membership in this supranational

union of states. The institutionalization of Croatia's relations with the EU began with the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The Agreement entered into force on February 1, 2005. Croatia applied for membership in the European Union on February 21, 2003 in Athens and the EU Council entrusted the European Commission with producing an opinion about Croatia's membership application. Based on European Commission's positive opinion, in June 2004 the European Council granted the Republic of Croatia formal status of a candidate for membership in the European Union. Formal negotiations about EU membership were opened on October 3, 2005 and were wrapped up on June 30, 2011. Croatia concluded 35 negotiating chapters and fulfilled Copenhagen and Maastricht political criteria. The Treaty of Accession was signed on December 9, 2011 in Brussels. This marked the end of the formal negotiation process, but also the beginning of an even more active promotional campaign for Croatia's citizens, aimed at a positive outcome of the referendum that the Constitution requires to be held within 90 days of the formalization of the Treaty of Accession. 66.27% voted in favour of Croatia's EU accession in the referendum held on January 22, 2012. The plan is to have Croatia join the EU as its 28th member on July 1, 2013 after the process of ratification of its Treaty of Accession by all member states and by Croatia. State administrative bodies began implementing informational campaigns and strategies of communication with the citizens at the very beginning of the European integration process in 2000. Youth of all age groups was one of the main target groups of information activities from the very beginning. The Ministry of European Integration, later reformed into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, was in charge of most of the communication and education campaigns in the entire period of the European integration process (2001-2011) in cooperation with other state administrative bodies like the Central State Office for Funds, the Central State Office for Administration, now reorganized into the Ministry of Administration, the Central Finance and Contracting Agency and the Delegation of the European Commission in Croatia, now transformed into the Delegation of the European Union in Croatia, the non-

governmental sector, the universities in the Republic of Croatia and, to a smaller extent, printed and electronic media.

The first *Communication Strategy Aimed at Informing the Croatian Public about the European Union and the Croatian Government's Preparations for Membership*, presented in 2001, set the strategic guidelines for informing Croatian citizens about the EU accession process. It was adopted as a formal document by the Government on January 27, 2006. "Among other things, the informing of young people about European integration processes was aimed at raising awareness about the idea of European integration and familiarizing this population with the course of the European integration processes in Croatia, introducing young people to the EU and the opportunities it provides for education, professional training and networking of Croatia's young people with their peers and youth associations in EU member states and candidate countries, encouraging the formation of a network of youth associations concerned with European integrations in Croatia, and the promotion of Croatian youth's participation in EU programmes. We must also not forget the so-called informal segment of communication policy – the establishment of a parliamentary consensus of all Croatia's political parties about Croatia's EU accession as a foreign policy priority at the very beginning of the European integration process. Activities aimed at the youth were based on interaction in form of lectures, summer and winter schools, debates, publication of specialized brochures, celebration of Europe Day, prize contents and the like, which also contributed to informal learning about these topics. The objective of this study, among other things, is therefore to establish how well-informed Croatian students actually are and how much they know about the European integration process and the EU policies, considering continuous educational and informational campaigns they have been exposed to in the past ten years of their lives, which is also how long the negotiation process has lasted. Our target group, students of communication sciences, were in a way exposed to certain kinds of formal and informal media information about EU policies on a daily basis. Their level of knowledge about European policies can therefore also be analyzed in the context of civic culture and information

they learned through various media they had been exposed to. Finally, it is important to point out that this survey was completed three months before the EU accession referendum, when the media activities in this department were not at their full intensity, as the parliamentary campaign had been in progress and the communication campaign had been discontinued.

3. Youth – the hot target group for informing

Croatia's youth is definitely one of the hottest target groups for information campaigns, since young people are affected by social changes substantially and known for interesting opinions, standpoints, values and impacts on current social, economic and political matters. Ultimately, they are the people who are going to be living in the European Union one day. With regard to awareness of the EU and the completion of Croatia's accession negotiations, we cannot help but wonder if more could have been done, if things could have been done better, and why the stakeholders of the negotiating process had not shared all relevant information with the public from the beginning of the negotiating process. Ilišin /1/ feels the main problem is that the political elites are reserved and are not allowing the citizens and the general public to directly participate in public discussions or to have access to the projects that their future in the political scene is depending on. As a result, they are better informed than their citizens, but they are also more responsible for decision-making. The extent to which the citizens are informed about European integrations is indicative of the quality and pace of this process, since the decisions made by the political elites who are at holding an information monopoly are at the same time reflected on them positively or negatively. It is therefore not surprising that the focus of activity has shifted on the youth as the hot target group for information activities and that attempts are being made to examine their preparedness to join the European society. The youth is a social group that is often marginalized. They are passive, uninterested in politics and lacking the time to deal with it, and they have a different value system than the older population. Ilišin was guided by this idea in her 2005 study of the connections between the youth and the politics

and their standpoints on the EU, undertaken not long after the negotiations were opened. The reasons for her interest were three-fold. Firstly, the enhancement of democratization in our country depends on youth involvement in politics. Secondly, it would be interesting to see to what extent the standpoints, values and opinions of youth in Croatia coincide with the opinions of their European peers. Finally, the government is obligated to actively involve youth in social processes /2/. The study focused on the comparison of a study from 1999 and another one from 2004, contrasting older and younger population and Croatian youth and EU youth. EU enlargement changed European integration research, causing a departure from the original research focusing on European institutions and policies and a shift towards the analysis of "the EU's impact on the dynamics and the scope of changes in member states" /3/. This came into focus especially after the enlargement wave in 2004, when former communist and socialist countries joined the European family. According to Ilišin and Mendeš, these new members were in no way compatible with the existing members. Most studies looked into "the impact of integration on the public opinion, primarily on the perception of the EU among the citizens of the countries involved" /4/. Studies of public opinion and EU support among Croatian citizens revealed oscillations in support caused by social and political circumstances (postponement of the opening of negotiations, problematic cooperation with the ICTY and blocked negotiations). A 2004 survey showed that the youth's position on the EU was neutral, but that the youth was definitely more optimistic than the older population, probably due to the positive *avis* and to great expectations. Two tendencies were observed: 1) youth perceived itself as the biggest winner in the process of Croatia's EU accession and 2) "youth consistently demonstrated a pronounced pro-European orientation compared to older population" /5/.

The study was split into two sections. In the first, the respondents were asked to assess their own knowledge about the European Union. This section examined self-perception and subjective assessments of the respondents. The second section was designed as an objective test of the respondents' knowledge, aimed at

establishing if the respondents' actual knowledge conformed to their perceptions using questions with yes/ no answers offered. The analysis of how well-informed the youth was about the EU looked into general awareness of the EU and developments in the EU, Croatia's EU accession, EU policies and institutions, and methods of gaining information about these topics /6/. The study revealed that the respondents mostly gained their information about the EU from all media, but that electronic media and the press prevailed, followed by talks and discussions with family and friends. However, the level of information activities was lower compared to their peers living in the EU. Furthermore, the youth only rarely referred to brochures and promotional materials prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration for additional information. Only every fifth member of the younger age group used them. The youth was mostly interested in social, cultural and educational topics and the EU's youth policies and were not so interested in daily politics, while their EU peers showed interest in other topics as well. Compared to EU residents, "as many as 73% of whom describe their level of information about these topics as low" /7/, Croatian respondents self-assessed their level of information as high. However, the test questions designed to check objective knowledge about the EU showed that the youth knew less about EU institutions than their peers residing in the EU and that their perception of their own knowledge did not conform to their actual knowledge levels. Also, the poor level of awareness of Croatia's accession process revealed by the study was an unpleasant surprise. There are two possible interpretations of such a result. One would be that "the youth was aware what an important topic the EU was for Croatia and therefore was reluctant to admit to an unsatisfactory level of awareness of this subject in the survey. The other would be that the increased coverage of European integration issues and Croatia's relations with the EU by the media created an impression in the respondents that they were actively seeking information about these subjects" /8/. In this paper we will try to establish the situation six years later, at a moment when Croatia has finally completed its long negotiations course, and we will try to see if the

youth is better informed about EU-related issues about Croatia's European integration course.

4. Euro-scepticism in Croatia: Should we be concerned?

We have mentioned earlier that surveys carried out by nongovernmental associations and organizations /9/ show that as many as a third of Croatian citizens are not aware of the fact that Croatia has wrapped up EU accession negotiations. Grubiša /10/ warns that the low level of citizen awareness of EU-related issues (functioning of the EU, its institutions and stakeholders) is the reason for diminished intelligibility and transparency of the accession process. In addition to the democratic deficit that the EU is concerned about, related to the information monopoly that the political elites are holding, there is also "the educational deficit, including a deficit of knowledge and mere awareness of what is happening, which is causing the European public to react to many phenomena occurring within the European Union with prejudice and stereotypes /11/. Blanuša /12/ is of the same opinion. He claims that the hypothesis about the "knowledge gap" /13/ fosters Euro-scepticism. Political elites really know the most about the EU because they are involved in the process directly, unlike ordinary citizens, whom they are thus able to manipulate. Studies have indeed revealed that people with highest education levels know the most about the EU, along with people for whom the EU is in daily focus of interest (journalists, businessmen, lawyers, academic community). "Lack of awareness and lack of knowledge about the EU are intertwined with misconceptions and misinformation, resulting in a negative mood toward the EU, its institutions, and its functioning" /14/. Naturally, all of these factors foster Euro-scepticism, which slows a country's European integration process additionally and contributes to the reserve of the EU member states and their withdrawal into their national borders. We mentioned earlier that the 2004 enlargement to ten new, mostly post-socialist and transition countries caused a shift in public opinion research, which started to focus on the impact the enlargement had on relations within the EU. While older studies showed that their low level of

awareness caused the citizens to give legitimacy to politicians to make decisions in their place, more recent studies show that the lack of interest on the citizens' part is being used as a manipulation tool "to promote integration as much as possible, on the other hand being largely guided by voters' preferences and their 'political mood'" /15/. The Government's inadequate communications strategy and selective and rather terse communication of information, mostly in form of press releases after each chapter was closed, are also among the factors that fuelled Euro-scepticism and occasional negative perception of the EU in Croatia. Part of the responsibility lies with the media, which covered each of the obstacles Croatia encountered in its negotiations in a sensationalist and negativist manner according to a "hot/cold" or "they like us/they don't like us" approach /16/. Štulhofer /17/ warns about two basic dimensions of Euro-scepticism in Croatia, the theoretical and the practical one. On the one hand we have an increasing aversion to EU accession and on the other we have a relatively stable distrust of the EU. As this applies to the citizens', and not the political elites' feelings for the EU, the author concedes to the use of the term "popular Euro-scepticism" which we have to tell apart from a radical form that would be characterized by extreme distrust in the EU and unconditional opposition to EU accession.

In addition to various social groups which usually have different motives for negative perceptions of the EU, such as exclusive nationalism, we must mention also the so-called situation influences, which include the use of European integration topics in daily politics, mostly in showdowns between political parties, or for special media emphasis, and the national institutions as an important factor in shaping trust in the EU. Štulhofer /18/ warns that the EU's reputation is "partially a reflection of the reputation of the government and the legal system, institutions that protagonists have more information (and sometimes also personal experience) about." The success of informational campaigns as one of the mechanisms for curbing Euro-scepticism is definitely going to depend on this factor as well.

5. Research methodology

5.1. Research objectives and hypotheses

The principal objective of the research was to analyze students' awareness and knowledge of Croatia's European integration course, with a special emphasis on the completion of Croatia's negotiations. The research also aimed to establish how well-informed the students were about the enlargement policy in the past seven years (2004-2011) and how well-informed they were about the functioning of the EU's internal market. Our starting theses were that the students were well-informed and knew more about Croatia's European integration course because the topic was in media focus more than EU enlargement policy in the past seven years. We also assumed that the students were well-informed about the functioning of the internal European market (familiar with the EU's institutional representatives, functioning of the Eurozone and so on).

5.2. Research method

A sample of 105 students of the graduate communications sciences programme at the University of Zagreb's Croatian Studies was encompassed by the survey. The respondents were given a closed-ended questionnaire and asked to pick the answer they felt was correct among the provided answers. The questionnaire was structured into three sections. The first focused on awareness of Croatia's European integration course, with a special emphasis on the completion of Croatia's accession negotiations. The objective was to establish whether the students knew when accession negotiations were opened between Croatia and the EU, how many chapters there were and in how many chapters

negotiations were held, which chapters caused the greatest controversies, which criteria Croatia had to fulfil in the negotiation process, which country blocked Croatia's negotiations and how long the blockade lasted. Furthermore, we wanted to know whether the respondents knew during which government's term the negotiations with the EU were opened and during which government's terms they were closed, how long Croatia had after the signing of the accession treaty to hold the referendum, and what the slogan of the government's referendum campaign was. The first section of the questionnaire ended with questions about the name of the head of the EU's delegation in Croatia and the address of the delegation's office. The second section of the questionnaire dealt with EU enlargement policy 2004-2011 and attempted to establish if the respondents knew which countries joined the EU in 2004 and which joined it in 2007. The questions also inquired which countries were the next candidates for EU accession and which had opened negotiations. The third and final section of the questionnaire attempted to establish how well-informed the students were about the functioning of the EU's internal market: which three old member states have not accepted the euro, which was the last member state to be admitted into the Eurozone at the beginning of 2011, and which EU member had not been affected by the financial crisis. We also wanted to know if the students knew which EU member states were not participating in the Schengen Area and which non member states were participating in it. The last set of questions in the third section addressed the leaders of European institutions (EU president, president of European Commission, main EU institutions and the number of EU member states).

5.3 Survey result charts

Chart 1: How many screening chapters are there?



Chart 2: How many negotiation chapters are there and in how many were negotiations held?

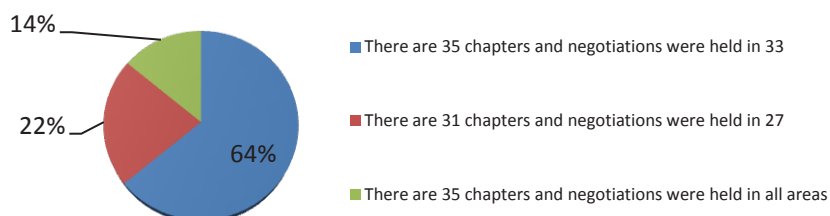


Chart 3: Which chapters sparked the most controversies?

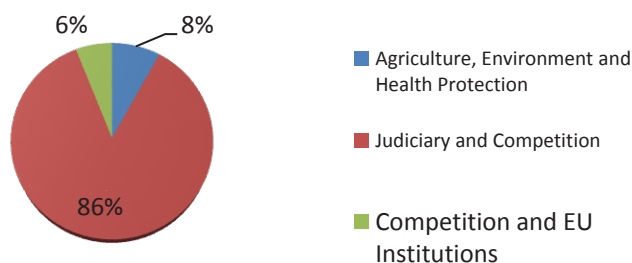


Chart 4: Which political criteria needed to be fulfilled in course of the negotiations?

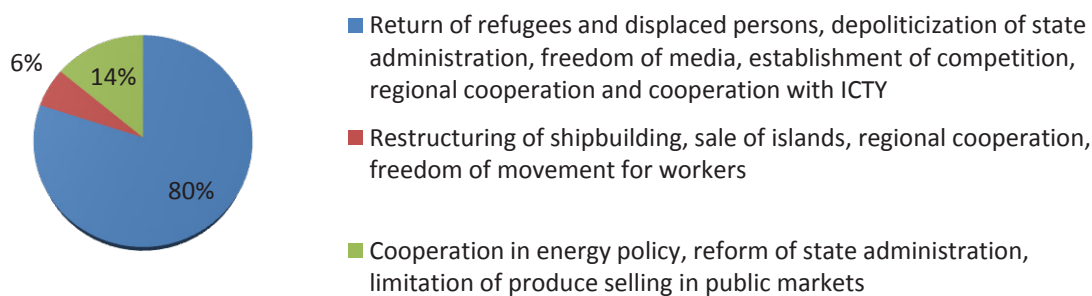


Chart 5: Which country blocked Croatia's accession in 2009?

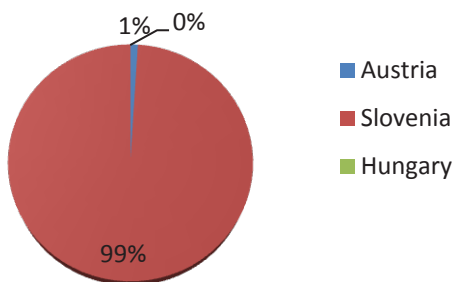


Chart 6: How long had the 2009 blockade lasted?

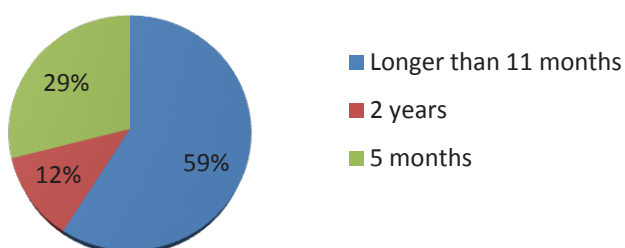


Chart 7: When were Croatia's accession negotiations completed?

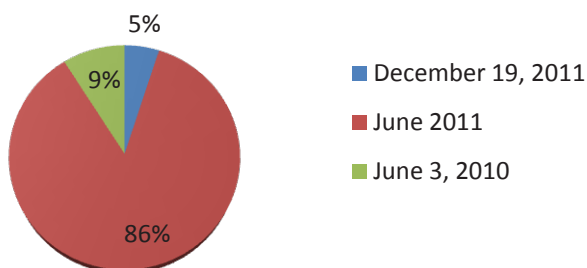


Chart 8: Under which country's presidency will Croatia sign the accession treaty?

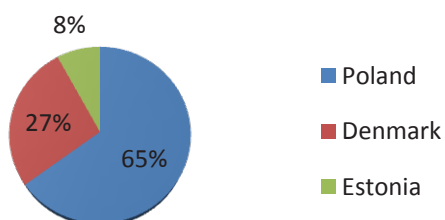


Chart 9: Under which country's presidency had the EU wrapped up negotiations with Croatia?

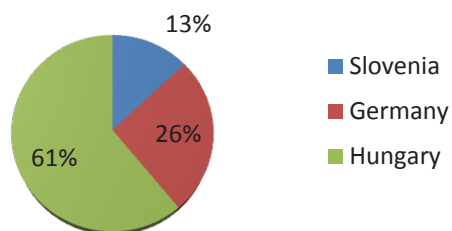


Chart 10: How long after the signing of the accession treaty does Croatia have to hold the referendum?

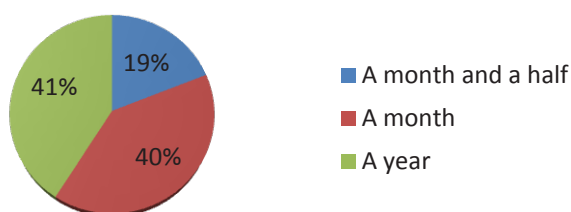


Chart 11: Who is the head of EU's delegation in Croatia?

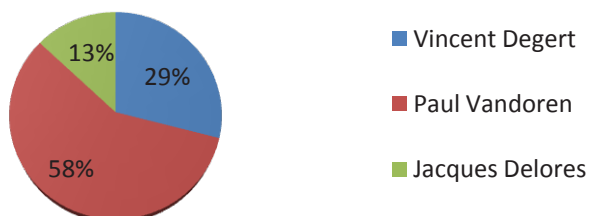


Chart 12: What is the address of the EU's delegation in Zagreb?

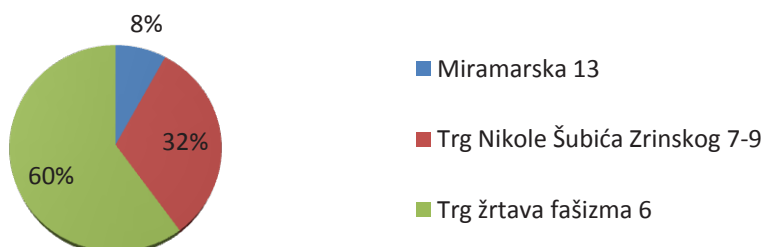


Chart 13: Who is the minister of foreign affairs and European integration?

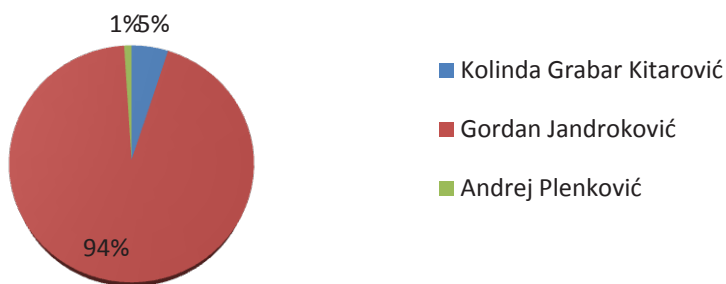


Chart 14: When will Croatia become a full EU member?

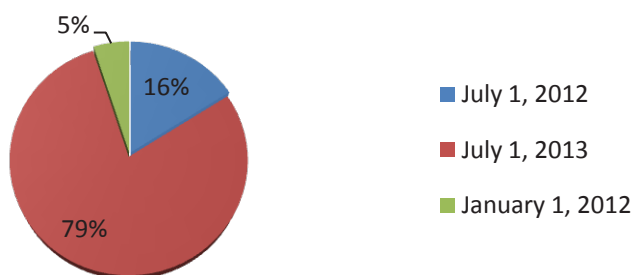


Chart 16: During which government's term were Croatia's negotiations closed?



Chart 17: What is the slogan of the Government's referendum campaign?

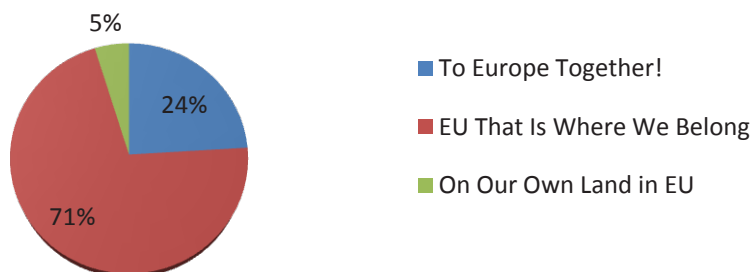


Chart 18: How many countries joined the EU in 2004?

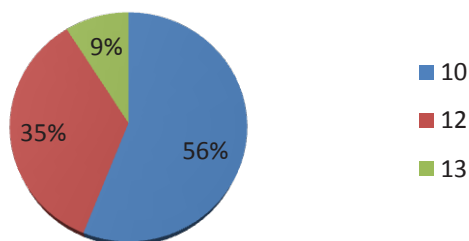


Chart 19: Which countries joined the EU in 2007?



Chart 20: Which countries are EU candidates?



Chart 21: Which countries have the status of potential EU candidate?



Chart 22: With which candidate countries have negotiations been opened?



Chart 23: Which three old member states have not accepted the euro?

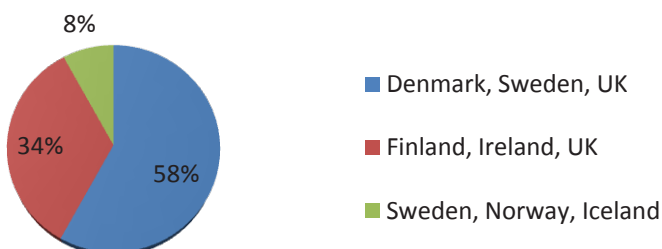


Chart 24: Which country was the last to join the Eurozone on January 1, 2011?

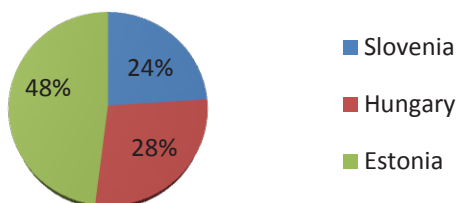


Chart 25: Which country was the only EU member not affected by the financial crisis?

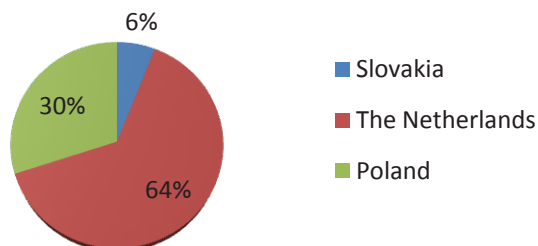


Chart 26: Which EU countries do not participate in the Schengen Area?

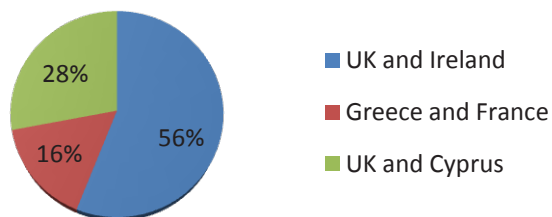


Chart 27: Which non EU member states participate in the Schengen Area?

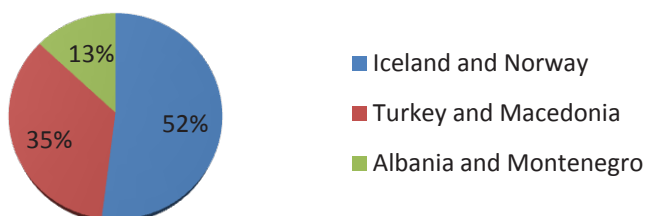


Chart 28: Who is EU President?

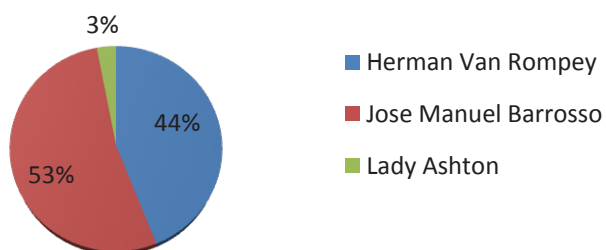


Chart 29: What is the name of EC president?

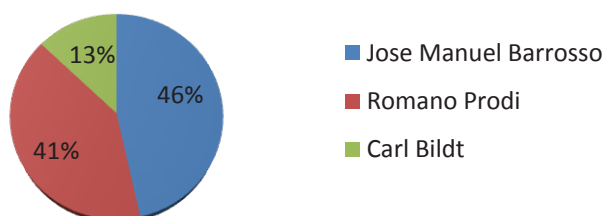
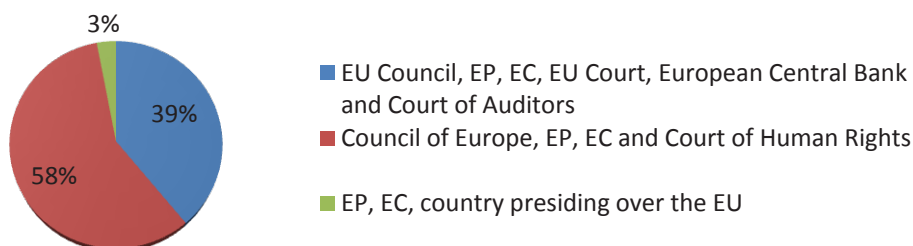
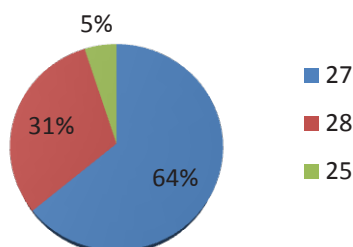


Chart 30: Main EU institutions are:**Chart 31: How many EU member states are there?**

5.4 Interpretation of results and discussion

The first section of the questionnaire examined knowledge of Croatia's European integration course. 49% of the respondents know that the negotiations were opened in 2004, but 38% believe that they were opened in 2000 and 13% think the whole process began in 2005. There were 33 screening chapters, of which 49% of the respondents are aware, while 42% think that there were 35 chapters and 9% think there were 30. There are a total of 35 negotiating chapters and negotiations were held in 33. 64% of the respondents answered this question correctly, while 22% think there were 31 negotiating chapters and that negotiations were held in 27, and 14% believe that negotiations were held in all 35 chapters. Judiciary and Competition were the chapters that sparked most controversies, of which 86% of the respondents are aware. 8% believe that Agriculture, Environment and Health Protection were the most controversial chapters, and 6% believe Competition and EU Institutions were the most controversial. Return of refugees and displaced persons, depoliticization of public

administration, freedom of media, establishment of competition, regional cooperation and cooperation with ICTY were some of the political criteria Croatia had to fulfil in course of the negotiations, and 80% of the respondents are aware of this fact. However, 14% of the respondents believe that the criteria Croatia had to fulfil included cooperation in energy policy, reform of state administration, and limitation of produce selling in public markets. 6% of the respondents believe the criteria included reconstruction of shipbuilding, sale of islands, regional cooperation and freedom of movement for workers. The respondents convincingly provided most correct answers to the question which country blocked Croatia's accession negotiations in 2009. 99% of the respondents know it was Slovenia, which is the result of huge media attention that this problem garnered, while 1% think it was Austria. Opinions are rather divided about the duration of Slovenia's blockade, though: 59% of the respondents know that it lasted for longer than 11 months, but 29% believe it lasted much shorter than that, for only 5 months, and 12% think the blockade lasted for

two years. June 2011 will be remembered as the date when Croatia wrapped up its accession negotiations, of which 86% of the respondents are aware. At the same time 9% of the respondents believe the negotiations were wrapped up in June 2010 and 5% think they were wrapped up in December 2011, probably under the influence of the date of signing of the Treaty of Accession. Furthermore, 65% of the respondents know that Croatia is going to sign the Treaty of Accession under Polish presidency and the rest think it is going to sign it under the presidency of one of Scandinavian countries (27% opted for Denmark and 8% for Estonia). At the same time, 61% of the respondents know Croatia completed its negotiations under Hungarian presidency. 26% think Germany had presided over the EU at the time and 13% think it had been Slovenia. The survey showed that the respondents are not familiar with the timeframe in which the referendum has to be held after the accession treaty is signed, since this was the question that received the most incorrect replies. Only 19% of the respondents know the referendum must be held within a month and a half. As many as 40% think Croatia has one month to hold the referendum, and 41% think it has one year. Paul Vandoren is the head of the EU's delegation in Croatia, of which 58% of the respondents are aware. 29% believe Vincent Degert is still at the helm of the delegation and 13% picked Jacques Delors. The answers to the question about the address of the EU's delegation in Zagreb were equally divided. 60% of the respondents are aware of the fact that the Delegation's office is located at the address Trg žrtava fašizma 6, 32% think the correct address is Trg Nikole Šubića Zrinskog, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration is located, and 8% of the respondents think the Delegation's office is on Miramarska Street. Most of the respondents (94%) know that Gordan Jandroković is the minister of foreign affairs and European integration, but 5% think Kolinda Grabar Kitarović is still the minister, and 1% think state secretary Andrej Plenković is the minister. The survey also showed that opinions were very much divided about the government during whose term Croatia opened negotiations with the EU. 57% of the respondents are aware that the process was started at the time of Račan's government, but as many as 40% think

the negotiations were opened at the time of Sanader's government. At the same time, 98% of the respondents are aware of the fact that the negotiations were wrapped up at the time of Jadranka Kosor's government. 74% of the respondents are aware of the Government's referendum campaign slogan – "EU – That's Where We Belong!". 25% think the slogan is "To Europe Together!" and only 1% of the respondents believe the slogan is "On Our Own Land in the EU!"

The second section of the survey examined the students' knowledge and awareness of EU enlargement policy 2004-2011, which the respondents were again familiar with. EU got 10 new members with the 2004 enlargement, which 56% of the respondents answered correctly. However, 35% of the respondents believe the EU got 12 new members and 9% think it got 13. The respondents are somewhat more familiar with the 2007 enlargement, since 82% know that Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU that year, but approximately an equal number of respondents (9%) thinks it was Latvia and Letonia, and Malta and Cyprus, respectively. 78% of the respondents know that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Turkey, Iceland and Montenegro are EU accession candidates in addition to Croatia. 13% of the respondents think the candidates include FYROM, Turkey, Albania and Montenegro, and 9% think they include Serbia, Montenegro and Iceland. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo have potential candidate status, a fact 76% of the respondents are aware of. 14% think that the status has been granted to Morocco in addition to Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 10% think potential candidates include Moldova, Albania and Kosovo. Furthermore, survey results showed that opinions about countries that have opened negotiations differ among respondents. 48% know Iceland and Turkey have opened negotiations, 29% believe that Serbia and Montenegro have the status in addition to Turkey, and 23% think this group of countries includes Turkey, FYROM and Iceland.

The third and final section of the survey examined basic awareness of the functioning of EU internal market. 58% of the respondents thus know that Denmark, Sweden and the UK are the three old member states that have not accepted

the euro. 34% believe Finland, Ireland and the UK have not accepted it, and only 8% claim the countries that have not accepted the euro include Sweden, Norway and Iceland. Estonia was the last country admitted into the Eurozone at the beginning of 2011, which 48% of the respondents are aware of, and the opinions of the rest of them are divided between Hungary (28%) and Slovenia (24%). Only 30% of the respondents know that Poland is the only EU member state that has not been affected by the financial crisis. As many as 64% think the Netherlands boasts this status and the remaining 6% think it is Slovakia. The UK and Ireland are EU member states not participating in the Schengen Area, a fact that 56% of the respondents are familiar with. 28% percent think the answer to this question is the UK and Cyprus and 16% think Greece and France are not participating in the Schengen Area. Iceland and Norway also participate in the Schengen Area even though they are not EU members, which 52% of the respondents knew. 35% think non-EU members participating in the Schengen Area are Turkey and FYROM and 13% think they are Albania and Montenegro. Answers to questions about the leading people of the European institutions showed that 44% of the respondents are aware of the fact that Herman Van Rompey is EU President. As many as 53% think this function is held by Jose Manuel Barroso and 3% think it is held by Lady Ashton. The opinions about EC President are equally divided: 47% of the respondents know it is Jose Manuel Barroso, 41% think it is Romano Prodi and 12% think it is Carl Bildt. Only 39% of the respondents are aware of the fact that EU Council, EP, EC, EU Court, European Central Bank and Court of Auditors are the main institutions of the EU. 58% think the main institutions are Council of Europe, EP, EK and Court of Human Rights, and 3% think they are EP, EC and the country presiding over the EU. Finally, 64% of the respondents know that the EU has 27 member states, 31% think it has 28, and 5% think the EU club is 25 members strong.

6. Conclusion

The survey revealed that the participants (students) are very well-informed about Croatia's European integration course and the completion of Croatia's accession negotiations, which fully confirmed the first hypothesis of the study. The

result is expected considering that the target group consisted of students of communication sciences, who keep track of the media more than their other peers. Questions that have been in media focus for a while, such as the number of negotiating chapters, the most controversial chapters, the fulfilment of political criteria for EU accession, the date when negotiations were closed, the blockade, and the government during whose term the negotiation process was wrapped up and the country that presided over the EU at the time received the most correct answers. It is indicative that only 19% of the respondents know in which period the EU accession referendum has to be held, which is a new information challenge that will have to be addressed in the upcoming referendum campaign. The second section of the survey, dealing with the students' awareness and knowledge of the EU enlargement policy in the last seven years (2004-2011), revealed that the students were well-informed, thus refuting the second hypothesis. The respondents exhibited an equal amount of interest in Croatia's European integration process and the integration processes of the neighbouring countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro). The last section of the survey showed that the respondents were only partially informed about the functioning of the EU's internal market, in part confirming the third hypothesis. Respondents correctly answered questions about countries that had not accepted the euro, the last country that was admitted into the Eurozone, and the countries participating and not participating in the Schengen Area, but showed a poor level of knowledge about the leading people of EU institutions (EU and EC president), which is probably a result of poorer media coverage. In the end, we can be satisfied with the level of awareness of the youth and the students about the EU and about Croatia's European integration course, since they are the group that is going to live in the EU and decide about the EU one day. Contrary to expectations, this group is an active rather than a passive participant of social changes. It would be interesting to look into the knowledge and awareness of the other social groups too, but that is a topic for another paper.

Notes

- /1/ Ilišin, V. (2005a). Mladi, Hrvatska i Europa: Uvod u istraživanje [Youth, Croatia and Europe: introduction to research]. In V. Ilišin (Ed.), *Mladi Hrvatske i europska integracija* [Croatian Youth and European Integration]. Zagreb: Institute for Social Research.
- /2/ Ilišin, V. (2005b). Političke vrijednosti, stavovi i participacija mladih: kontinuitet i promjene [The youth's political values, standpoints and participation: continuity and changes]. In V. Ilišin (Ed.), *Mladi Hrvatske i europska integracija* [Croatian Youth and European Integration]. Zagreb: Institute for Social Research.
- /3/ Ilišin, V., & Mendeš, I. (2005). Mladi i Europska unija: Percepcija posljedica integracije [The youth and European Union: the perception of the consequences of integration]. In V. Ilišin (Ed.), *Mladi Hrvatske i europska integracija*. Zagreb: Institute for Social Research.
- /4/ Ibidem
- /5/ Ibidem
- /6/ Mendeš, I. (2005). Znanje i informiranost o Europskoj uniji [Knowledge and awareness of the European Union]. In V. Ilišin (Ed.), *Mladi Hrvatske i europska integracija* [Croatian Youth and European Integration]. Zagreb: Institute for Social Research.
- /7/ Ibidem
- /8/ Ibidem
- /9/ Ponoš, T. (2011, September 15). Trećina građana ne zna da smo završili pregovore za članstvo [A third of the citizens does not know we have wrapped up membership negotiations]. Retrieved December 13, 2011 from <http://www.novolist.hr/Vijesti/Hrvatska/Trecina-gradana-ne-zna-da-smo-završili-pregovore-za-clanstvo>
- /10/ Grubiša, D. (2005). Politička aksiologija Europske unije: ciljevi i vrijednosti europske integracije [Political axiology of European Union: objectives and values of European integration]. In V. Ilišin (Ed.), *Mladi Hrvatske i europska integracija* [Croatian Youth and European Integration]. Zagreb: Institute for Social Research.
- /11/ Ibidem
- /12/ Blanuša, N. (2006). Euroskepticizam: razine istraživanja i oblici iskazivanja [Euro-scepticism: research levels and manifestation forms]. *Analiza Hrvatskog politološkog društva*, 3, 325-346.
- /13/ Kunczik, M., & Zipfel, A. (2006). *Uvod u znanost o medijima i komunikologiju* [Introduction to the Science of Publicism and Communication]. Zagreb: Friedrich Ebert Foundation.
- /14/ Grubiša, D. (2005). Politička aksiologija Europske unije: ciljevi i vrijednosti europske integracije [Political axiology of European Union: objectives and values of European integration]. In V. Ilišin (Ed.), *Mladi Hrvatske i europska integracija* [Croatian Youth and European Integration]. Zagreb: Institute for Social Research.
- /15/ Blanuša, N. (2006). Euroskepticizam: razine istraživanja i oblici iskazivanja [Euro-scepticism: research levels and manifestation forms]. *Analiza Hrvatskog politološkog društva*, 3, 325-346.
- /16/ Ibidem
- /17/ Štulhofer, A. (2003). Euroskepticizam u Hrvatskoj: s onu stranu racionalnosti? [Euro-scepticism in Croatia: beyond rationality?]. In K. Ott (Ed.), *Pridruživanje Hrvatske Europskoj uniji* [Croatia's EU Accession] (p. 135-154). Zagreb: Institute of Public Finance, Friedrich Ebert Foundation.
- /18/ Ibidem

Literature

1. Republic of Croatia. Ministry for European Integration (2006.) *Komunikacijska strategija za informiranje hrvatske javnosti o Europskoj uniji i pripremama za članstvo* [The Communication Strategy Aimed at Informing the Croatian Public about the European Union and the Croatian Government's Preparations for Membership]. Retrieved December 13, 2012 from <http://www.mvep.hr/ei/default.asp?ru=135&sid=&akcija=&jezik=1>
2. Sjauš, P. (2011, September 16). Rezultati istraživanja informiranosti građana o pristupanju u EU [Results of research of the citizens' awareness of EU accession]. Retrieved December 13, 2011 from <http://politika.hr/hrvatska/5889-rezultati-istrazivanja-informiranosti-gradana-o-pristupanju-u-eu>